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ABSTRACT

A total of 203 teachers of 5-year-olds in public school kindergartens representing 35 states responded to a questionnaire about traditional circle games. The teachers were asked to identify three of the favorite traditional circle games used in their classrooms and to indicate how often and how long the games were played. In addition, teachers were provided with a list of major purposes for including games in the curriculum, and asked to rank the purposes for the games they had identified. The most common pairing of estimates of frequency and duration was that of three times per week at 30 minutes per game. The three major purposes for which traditional circle games were played were those of providing fun, and fostering social and physical motor development. Music-movement and racing games were the major game categories mentioned. Specifically, "Duck, Duck, Goose," "Farmer in the Dell," and "Hokey Pokey" were the three most frequently identified traditional circle games named by respondents. Six data tables are included. (Author/RH)

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A Study of Traditional Circle Games of Five-Year-Old United States Public School Kindergarten Children

submitted by

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Running Head: Traditional Circle Games

Abstract

Two hundred and three teachers of five-year-olds in public school kindergartens representing 35 states responded to a questionnaire about traditional circle games. The teachers were asked to identify three of the favorite traditional circle games used in their classroom and the frequency and duration of which they were played. In addition, teachers were asked to rank order the major purposes for including these games in the curriculum. Three times per week for thirty minutes was the most common response in regard to frequency and duration of which circle games are played. The three major purposes identified for playing traditional circle games were fun, social development, and physical motor development. Music/movement games and racing games were the major game categories mentioned. Specifically. "Duck, Duck, Goose," "Farmer in the Dell," and the "Hokey Pokey" were the three most frequently identified traditional circle games named by respondents.

INTRODUCTION

Historically, playing games can be traced back as far as 2600 B.C., when archaeologists recorded a Sumerian game board, (Aurdon & Smith, 1971). However, the value of children playing games, as well as the classification, definition, and interpretation of the term "games" remain many and widely varied. For example, one of the theorists, G. Stanley Hall (1906) believed that "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny" and sees children's games as the reproduction of activities natural, and even essential, to our early ancestors but having little relation to today's modern milieu. Groos (1898) concluded that through children's games we have what is essentially an exercise contributory to the development of the physical organs. Groos further explained that playing games is motivated by a basic urge or instinct such as an urge to chase or an urge for physical contact (wrestling). Freud (1930) and his followers believed games substitute or compensate for instincts suppressed by the normal conscience. Huizinga (1949) believed all play is a voluntary activity and is either a contest for something or a representation of something. Roberts, Sutton-Smith, and Kozelka (1967) contended that games have a formative influence on child development, particularly "character development".

Even though there are many theories and beliefs about what constitutes play or a game, there is no concensus about the purposes and importance of game playing. Avedon and Sutton-Smith (1971) have suggested that the game is perhaps a more fruitful and important field to investigate than has actually been realized. They further stated there is a need for collecting and studying traditional games before they are completely replaced by those of more modern origin. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to determine what traditional children's games are being played in 1987 in the five-year-old public school

kindergarten classes across the United States, for what purposes are the games being played, and how much time is allotted to playing games.

METHOD

Subjects:

The sample consisted of 203 teachers of five-year-olds in public school kindergarten representing 35 states. Kindergarten teachers were selected by early childhood educators in each state (see procedures). Demographic data about the teacher consisting of gender, number of years teaching, teaching experience, and teaching major was obtained, as well as number of children and class ethnic composition.

Table 1 reveals that ninety-eight percent of the respondents were female. Fifty-eight percent of them had also taught primary school, only 22% of them had taught fourth through sixth grades, and one-third of them had also taught other grades. Respondents had an average of 14 years of teaching experience, and had spent an average of 10 years teaching kindergarten.

Ninety-eight percent of the respondents had a college degree, and 95% of them had taken college courses in early childhood education and/or child development. The most frequent college major was elementary education (43%), and the next most common major was early childhood education (23%).

The kindergarten classes consisted predominantly of Caucasian students. The classes also typically contained a small number of minority members. A roughly equal number of boys and girls were present, with an average of 16 boys and 15 girls. The average class size was 31 students.

Insert Table 1 about here

Procedure:

A questionnaire was developed to gather data about traditional circle games being used in five-year-old public school kindergarten throughout the United States. The questionnaires were mailed to members of a unit of Organisation Mondiale pour L'Education Prescolaire (OMEP/USNC). The OMEP members then distributed the questionnaire to kindergarten teachers in their respective states. Kindergarten teachers were asked to identify three of the favorite traditional circle games used in their classroom and the frequency and duration of which they were played. Following the identification of the three games, they were asked to rank order the major purposes for including these games in the curriculum and to relate how traditional circle games helped to meet the goals of the curriculum. A total of 203 surveys were collected from kindergarten teachers in 35 states.

Results:

The questions, "How often do children play traditional circle games?" and "How much time weekly is spent playing traditional circle games?" were asked. Table 2 illustrates the responses given by teachers in regard to how often their children play traditional circle games and for how long. Three times per week and weekly were the most common frequencies of game playing. Thirty minutes and twenty minutes were the most common durations. When considered in more detail, three times per week for thirty minutes was most common (14.72%), followed by weekly for 15 minutes (9.14%) and weekly for 20 minutes (8.12%) and daily for a duration other than those specified (8.12%).

Insert Table 2 about here

Teachers were asked to describe three of the traditional circle games they play with their students. These games were categorized, and the number of times each category was indicated in the reporting of the three tradition circle games by each teacher is shown on Table 3. Music/movement games (26.5%) and racing games (21.1%) were the most frequent categories indicated. Teachers were given the following purposes for playing traditional circle games and asked to rank order these purpose for each of the three games they selected: social development, intellectual development, physical motor development, sensory development, emotional development, relaxation, fun, and others. Table 4 summarizes the number of times each purpose was ranked as the most important in the reporting of three games. Fun (27.3%), social development (25.4%), and physical/motor development (22.1%) were the most common purposes for teachers having their students play traditional circle games. These data are weighted quite heavily by only a few games. Although a total of 194 traditional circle games were identified by respondents, several games were mentioned most frequently. For example, "Duck Duck Goose," was indicated 18.4% of the time. "Farmer In the Dell" accounts for an additional 8.9% of the responses. In other words, although kindergarten teachers as a whole are having their students play a wide variety of traditional circle games, only a few of these games are popular throughout the group. Table 5 contains the number of times each of the most popular traditional circle games was indicated by kindergarten teachers when reporting the three games most played in their classrooms.

Insert Tables 3, 4, and 5 about here

Kindergarten teachers were also asked what relationship they saw between playing traditional circle games in their classrooms and the goals of the curriculum. Table 6 indicates that the results of this question identified the

same four major skill areas as did the question in which teachers were asked to give the purpose for each of the these traditional circle games they had identified as reported in Tables 3, 4, and 5. Development of social skills (19.3%), promoting physical development (17.3%), development of intellectual skills (14.8%), and fostering enjoyment and relaxation (12.8%) were the most frequently given response for the relationship of traditional circle games and the goals of the curriculum; whereas fun (27.3%), social development (25.4%), physical motor development (22.1%) and intellectual development (15.0%) were the most frequently mentioned reasons for playing the three selected traditional circle games.

Discussion:

According to this study, teachers of public school kindergartens throughout the United States are playing traditional circle games with their children but are they playing them enough? Is thirty minutes, three times a week enough? What is happening during the remaining hours of the kindergarten day (many of which are full days)?

Many educators agree that what is happening is that kindergartens are becoming more of an "all work, no play" setting. As summed up by a teacher of seventeen years in a recent Miami Herald (1987) article, "Kindergarten is not what it was. Now it is schedule, schedule, schedule. In the 1980's, it's goodbye blocks, hello books. Goodbye recess, hello structured activity. Goodbye free play, hello homework, report cards, social studies, science, reading, writing and Stanford Achievement Tests." This is happening and yet, David Elkind (1987), an internationally known child development specialist, states that young children do not do their best learning while sitting quietly at the desk listening to the teacher. He adds that young children learn best through their own experience. Young children learn from being actively involved with real objects, talking with people, learning to solve problems, making mistakes and trying again, until they say "I can" and "I did it!". Through the involvement in a variety of traditional circle games, children have the opportunity to experience all of the above.

According to Sava (1987), children learn via play, and what appears to adults as aimless can actually be helping children learn about themselves and the world around them. The teachers in this study agreed that playing traditional circle games helps develop important skills in young children. When teachers were asked to identify the purposes for playing the selected traditional circle games and how these games related to the goals of the curriculum, the following skills were those most frequently identified:

social development, physical development, intellectual development, fun, and relaxation. The identification of these skills supports the theories of many researchers (Piaget, 1962; Iverson, 1982; Tway, 1983; Cheyne & Rubin, 1983; Bruner, Jolly, & Sylva, 1976) who proport that play, in general, is a major medium for the overall development of the child during the preschool years. This identification of skills also agrees with responses given by teachers and parents when they were asked to define play. Rothlein and Brett (1987) found that teachers defined play as enjoyment, fun, and/or amusing; as a way of developing social skills; as a means of developing cognitive abilities; and for developing physical motor skills.

If kindergartens are indeed becoming too academic and if not enough time is being spent in play activities, then educators need to speak out more emphatically about the importance of play. Teachers and parents need to realize that play does facilitate many types of learning -- academics is not the entire solution to the need for the overall development of the child.

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TABLE 1

Respondent Demographics

Gender	N	Percent
Male	3	1.5
Female	191	97.5
Missing	9	1.0
TOTAL	203	100.0

Teaching Major	N	Percent
Early Childhood	45	22.5
Elementary Education	86	43.0
E C/Elementary	19	9.5
Home Ec	18	9.0
Other	32	16.0

Number of Years Teaching	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
	200	14.41	7.41

Number of Years Teaching Kindergarten	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
	103	10.32	7.41

Teaching Experience	YES N	YES Percent	NO N	NO Percent
Have you taught primary school?	117	57.9	85	42.1
Have you taught grades 4-6?	45	22.3	157	77.7
Have you taught other grades?	65	32.2	137	67.8

Education	YES N	YES Percent	NO N	NO Percent
Have you taken college courses?	191	95.5	9	4.5
Do you have a college	199	99.0	2	1.0

Table 1 (Continued)

Number of Students	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
	199	30.98	12.54
Boys	192	15.89	6.74
Girls	193	14.81	6.74
Black Americans	112	5.92	7.46
Mexican Americans	40	2.73	3.75
Migrants	39	4.26	7.43
Asians	69	2.36	3.83
Caucasians	162	25.57	13.90
American Indians	33	1.97	3.25
Other	30	3.67	7.01

TABLE 2

Frequency Reported for Playing Traditional Circle Games
In Public Kindergartens in the United States

Duration	Daily N	Daily %	Three Times per Week N	Three Times per Week %	Weekly N	Weekly %	Other N	Other %	Total N	Total %
10 minutes	1	0.51	1	0.51	13	6.60	9	4.57	24	12.18
15 minutes	1	0.51	10	5.08	18	9.14	4	2.03	33	16.75
20 minutes	2	1.02	12	6.09	16	8.12	8	4.06	38	19.29
25 minutes	2	1.02	6	3.05	3	1.52	2	1.02	13	6.60
30 minutes	9	4.57	29	14.72	8	4.06	5	2.54	51	25.89
Other	16	8.12	7	3.55	3	1.52	12	6.09	38	19.29
TOTAL	31	15.74	65	32.99	61	30.96	40	20.30	197	100.00

TABLE 3

Total Number of Times Each Traditional Circle Game Category was Reported By Kindergarten Teacher.

Traditional Circle Game Categories	N	Percent
Music/Movement Games (i.e.,"Marching Around the Alphabet", "Hokey Pokey")	156	26.5
Racing Games (i.e.,"Drop the Handkerchief", "Duck, Duck, Goose")	124	21.1
Cooperative/Social Games (i.e.,Farmer in the Dell", "Hot Potato")	95	16.1
Guessing Games (i.e.,"Doggie and the Bone", "Button, Button")	56	9.5
Circle Games (i.e.,"Charades", "Exercises", "Funchanella")	36	6.1
Chasing Games (i.e.,"Cat & Mouse", "Squirrel in a Tree")	32	5.4
Academic Games (i.e., Math, Spelling, Hangman)	31	5.3
Ball Games (i.e., Dodgeball, Wonderball)	19	3.2
Catching Games (i.e.,"Cut the Pie", "Red Rover")	18	3.1
Misc.	13	2.2
Finger Playing Games (i.e.,"Five Little Monkeys", "Thumpkin")	5	0.2
Exerting Games (i.e., Relays, Running)	4	0.7

TABLE 4

Total Number of Times Each Purpose was Rated Most Important By Kindergarten Teacher.

Purpose	N	Percent
Fun	131	27.3
Social development	122	25.4
Physical Motor development	106	22.1
Intellectual development	72	15.0
Sensory development	27	5.6
Relaxation	10	2.1
Other	8	1.7
Emotional development	4	0.8

TABLE 5

Number of Times the Name of Each Traditional Circle Games was Reported By Kindergarten Teacher.

Name of Traditional Circle Games	N	Percent
Duck, Duck Goose	103	18.4
Farmer in the Dell	50	8.9
Hokey Pokey	37	6.6
Records, i.e., Hap Palmer's, Colors, Marching Around the Alphabet, etc.	30	5.4
Doggie and the Bone	21	3.7
All others*	320	57.0

*A total of 194 traditional circle games were named by respondents.

TABLE 6

Relationship Between Traditional Circle Games
and Goals of the Curriculum

Goals of Curriculum That Circle Games Promote	N	Percent
Development of Social Skills	74	18.3
Promote Physical Development	70	17.3
Development of Intellectual Skills	60	14.8
Foster Enjoyment and Relaxation	52	12.8
Promote Group Participation	41	10.1
Develop Skills in Following Directions, Listening and Paying Attention	39	9.6
Development of Language Skills	26	6.4
Develop Self-confidence/Positive Self-image	22	5.4
Promote Emotional Development	18	4.4
Develop Motivation for Learning	4	.9